

VZCZCXRO3078
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHYN #0285/01 0521242

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211242Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6410
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0010
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIASS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0071
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFIASS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHBFVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RHMFIASS/COMUSCENTAF SHAW AFB SC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000285

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2017

TAGS: MOPS PINR PREL YM

SUBJECT: SAADA: FIGHTING INTENSIFIES WITH TROOP SURGE

REF: A. SANAA 263
1B. SANAA 243
1C. SANAA 226
1D. SANAA 221
1E. SANAA 211

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR THOMAS C. KRAJESKI, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Fighting in Saada intensified over the past week as ROYG troop deployments in Saada doubled to nearly 15,000. Estimates of troops killed in ambushes and direct attacks on military installations are between 50 and 100, with at least 200 injured. Casualties among the al-Houthi are difficult to confirm, but currently appear much lower. Al-Houthi reportedly brought the fight to Sanaa by dumping the bodies of several security officers in locations around the city in a scare tactic against the security and military services. Despite these actions and the escalation of fighting in Saada, post does not see the potential for a wider conflict that would threaten the regime at this time. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Since fighting broke out again in earnest on January 27, the ROYG has nearly doubled its troop presence in Saada to between 12,000 and 15,000 regular troops, mostly from the 1st Armored Division, according to DAO's government sources, and has begun using fighter jets for bombing missions. The Government has sought public support for these deployments and ensuing military action through a nationwide media campaign using strong rhetoric against the al-Houthi, calling them for example, "ignorant forces of darkness who adopted deviant terrorist and racist ideas." The President also secured Parliament's authorization for a military campaign, held public, televised meetings of the Supreme Defense Council, and issued three public ultimatums demanding that the al-Houthi lay down their arms -- all of which were ignored.

13. (C) The al-Houthi, for their part, have engaged in guerrilla-style fighting through ambushes and attacks on military personnel and facilities in Saada, resulting in the deaths of between 50 and 100 troops, according to ROYG officials and media outlets. President Saleh estimated the number of injured troops at 250. The Government has been

silent on the number of al-Houthi casualties, and the inability of Yemeni civilians, including journalists, to travel to Saada has made it difficult to ascertain confirmed numbers, but most observers believe that the al-Houthis' losses are much lower than the Government's. (NOTE: Media reports that telephone communications to and from Saada have been cut are false. END NOTE)

¶ 14. (C) While the al-Houthis have not been able to match the Government's media campaign, the insurrectionists have reportedly begun psychological operations targeted against the ROYG's security and military services. Over the past 10 days, the al-Houthis reportedly dumped the dead bodies of several police officers from Saada in locations around Sanaa. Unlike during previous military campaigns against the al-Houthis in 2004 and 2005, however, post has not received reports of grenade attacks or assassination plots against ROYG officials in Sanaa.

¶ 15. (C) Contacts have reported separately that certain Saada tribesmen are backing the al-Houthis, not for ideological links to the group, but rather out of anger toward the ROYG for not receiving the kind of budget outlays they were privy to in previous years. DAO also reports that individual young tribesmen from al-Jawf province have reinforced the al-Houthi fighters, although not with the explicit blessing of their tribal leaders.

¶ 16. (C) COMMENT: This third phase of violence between the al-Houthis and ROYG forces has thus far followed the same pattern as in 2004 and 2005. What began as small clashes at the end of January has escalated as the Government deploys more troops and attempts to garner political support among key constituencies and the public at large. As in previous campaigns, post expects to see an increase in losses on both sides and potential al-Houthi operations against specific

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targets in Sanaa.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT CONT'D: The Government has emphasized both publicly and privately that this time it wants to break the al-Houthis' back. It is not clear to post at this point that the Government can wipe out every member of what appears to be a highly dispersed and decentralized group that feels it has little to lose and believes it is fighting for a just cause. At the same time, we do not see any signs that the al-Houthis are capable of destabilizing the regime. Tribal support for the insurrectionists bears watching, but we do not yet have the sense that the tribes in Saada intend to do anything more than enjoy seeing Saleh's nose bloodied. END
COMMENT
KRAJESKI